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**ABSTRACT**

Values are more easily discussed than manipulated or measured. A curricular development project aimed at developing critical television viewing skills has developed a curriculum for the middle school grades. The project is based on the assumption that children can utilize certain viewing, listening, and reading skills and analytic procedures to modify source, message, and medium effects, and that these skills and procedures can be taught in the regular classroom. Among the goals of the project are to prepare young persons to identify and evaluate the values and value conflicts embedded in much of television content, and to provide experiences in value clarification, including the consideration of reasonable alternatives to the problem solutions presented in television programs. One classroom approach is to work out descriptions of children's favorite television characters, identify the values represented by the characters, and explore values inherent in different situations. This process can help teach children value identification, value clarification, and value judgment. (TJ)

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TELEVISED VALUES AND FAMILY VALUES: TEACHING RECEIVERSHIP SKILLS  
TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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The notion of values continues to be an ephemera, much more easily discussed than manipulated or measured. The typical psychologic perspective speculates on quasi-stable psychic structures which develop after birth through interaction with the environment. These structures are modifiable, but not with facility. This conceptualization provides causative or conditional explanation for behavior. One explores values from this perspective as predictors of behavior. Social planners worry about values because they represent sources of pro-social or anti-social behavior.

More recent notions would describe values as sense-making devices which provide standard, verbal explanation for behavioral tracks. They are verbal answers to the question--why did I do that? In this perspective, values are explored in order to describe the process by which meaning is attributed to actions by an individual. Values under this conceptualization are not conditions of behavior but the explanations of behavior.

The differences between these perspectives are obviously substantive and substantial. It is not my intent to argue one over the other. What I wish to do is to show that educational purposes are less well served under the first perspective than under the second. Adopting the first perspective forces one to consider television as a modifier of cognitive structures. It requires the consideration of the construction process, its developmental timing and its entry points. This perspective motivates a clinical approach to change.

Adopting the second perspective gets us outside of the human black box once more. No longer need one be concerned with cognitive structures that direct behaviors, but rather one deals with another behavior--the

explanation process involved in value expression. Modifying explanations is clearly the stuff of education. Most cognitive education is the rehearsal of explanation: "The earth goes around the sun," "Columbus discovered America." And the validating mark that learning has occurred is the ability to reproduce, either directly or indirectly, the proper explanation. Individuals become "better" educated when they offer "better" explanations: "The earth and the sun are in dependent, galactic orbits," and "Leif Ericsson discovered America."

All of this discussion is prelude to what I want to pursue with you today concerning value training within the Receivership Skills project. I will warn you that I am not going to satisfy the "value-as-cognitive-structure" person.

In 1970 it was my pleasure, with my co-author Milton Ploghoft, to address the Speech Communication Association with an argument that the standard paradigms of television effects research was an inadequate base for the development of social policy because its implications were wholly limited to unacceptable controls of content. In that paper we outlined a curricular development project which was aimed at the development of critical viewing skills--Receivership Skills--which would intervene in what was then considered the more or less direct transfer from tube to brain.

It is now my pleasure to tell you that the idea has a firm beginning. Anderson and Ploghoft have developed a Receivership Skills curriculum for the middle school grades and have implemented it in several test-bed school districts throughout the United States. They are also the prime content consultants for a three year Title IV-C innovative education grant to accomplish the same task at the lower elementary

level]. The Office of Education has just recently funded critical viewing projects at each educational level. Rightly or wrongly Ploghoft and myself take some pride in having been in the vanguard of this approach.

For those of you who may not have been with us in 1970, very briefly, the Receivership Skills project is based on two assumptions: (1) That children can utilize certain viewing, listening, reading skills and analytical procedures to modify source, message and medium effects; and (2) that these skills and procedures can be taught in the ordinary classroom using curricular materials and instructional approaches specifically designed for that purpose. The development of the curricular elements has been guided by several specific goals:

- 1) To raise the levels of understanding about the nature and uses of TV in the United States.
- 2) To provide the young person with analytical tools that will be useful in the evaluation of the content of entertainment programs particularly in regards to perceived reality, value clarification and aesthetics.
- 3) To provide young persons with concepts and skills that enable them to analyze persuasive messages, to identify persuasive appeals, image techniques and the control of the information presented.
- 4) To provide the young person with product evaluation techniques.
- 5) To provide young persons with concepts that will enable them to use television news with an understanding of its limitations and structural biases.
- 6) To provide young persons with the opportunity to learn about their own personal uses of TV; what they like and dislike; how much they watch, when and why.
- 7) To prepare the young person to identify and evaluate the values and value conflicts embedded in much of television content and to provide experiences in value clarification including the consideration of reasonable alternatives to the problem solutions presented in TV programs.

It is this last goal that I wish to address today. It considers television as an explanation source which can be used to collate



behaviors in sense-making categories. It also considers analytical techniques which enable the student to evaluate the kinds of behaviors which can be included in an explanation. Again, for our purposes, a value is something which provides a criterion by which the "worth" of an action may be explained. One's values are shown by the explanation that a person offers for what a person does. The consistent actions of television characters also exhibit the values which have been created in the characterization. The explanation of the "worth" of these consistent actions can be adopted by the viewer. Information and explanation sources are most effective where there is a vacuum. If the child has an effective value structure of his own, we would expect other value sources to have little influence. On the other hand where there is uncertainty, value conflict, or the absence of values, the pre-conditions for influence are established. The effect of television can be described with the following analogy to light: Consider the influence of television to be like a flashlight. Consider the influence of parents, peers, the societal institutions of school, church, etc. to be like the sun. Take a flashlight out on a bright, sunny day and it's difficult to tell if it is on. But for the child in shadow cut off from those dominating influences, the flashlight can become a beacon.

Children's values develop in such a way that they may not be able to adequately utilize the explanation. If those experiences conflict with what they see on television, the child may become unsure of her standards. Our contribution in the classroom can be to identify the values which the continuing characters represent. And to indicate that other values may include, if not better, at least different solutions. The knowledge that others also may not feel good about some consistent

way that a problem is solved, can be very reassuring.

One classroom approach which has been used is to work out descriptions with the children of their favorite TV characters. These descriptions provide the qualities and the value of those qualities that the child assigns to each character. (From our experience children will positively value those characters who represent the values expressed at home. When there are substantial differences, it can represent a temporary or long standing conflict area for the child.) Once the descriptions have been developed further explorations of values can be accomplished through the ambiguous situation technique. This method makes use of common problem situations--"you just found a dollar bill; what do you do with it?"--and asks the child to provide solutions. The solutions might include what the child would do, what various TV characters would do, what the right thing would be and so on.

Fifth and sixth grade children will certainly be ready to participate in a process of value analysis. This process embodies three steps: Value identification, value clarification and value judgment. Value identification is the development of a definition couched in behavioral terms. Value identification helps the child develop explanations in behavioral terms for what it means to be truthful, peace-loving, aggressive, cynical and the like. Value identification can, of course, begin by looking for behavior consistencies which can be included in a common explanation. Children's television characters are usually developed with an observable degree of rigidity in value expression. They are consequently somewhat less lifelike, but good sources of examples for values.

Value clarification involves the application of the value to



differing situations. Value clarification explores the consequences of holding a value. What solutions to the dollar bill questions would come from an honest person, a miserly one? Value clarification also involves discussion of value conflict. An individual is often faced with situations where different values suggest different courses of action. Value clarification indicates these points of conflict and helps the child establish the scope or the limits of a value.

The last step is value judgment which is the comparison of the behaviors subsumed by a particular value with the consequences of those values held personally, held by the family, or promoted by social institutions. It also involves the analysis of the worth of each. The process of value judgment is an important intervention between the media presentation and the child. Instruction in value judgment provides the child with techniques of careful examination of the extended consequences of behaving in certain ways. The primary analytical technique, here, is that of projection. One need only to establish a situation and then to project characters with different values into that situation and consider the behavioral results. One of those characters should be the individual. The plot of the television entertainment program can provide several ready-made situations.

There is little question that more than a little care must be taken when dealing in the area of values. The teacher must work to preserve a positive atmosphere. There are, of course, many approaches to the same problem. To suggest that one is better than another runs some risk. A neutral exploration of the consequences of a given solution is generally more satisfactory. Teachers directing students to make one choice over another have raised parental concern to the point where in some school

districts the school board has forbidden any presentations which require the student to participate in value discussions. The traditional notion of value, then, constrains the development of innovative solutions to the task of developing critical viewing skills. The adoption of the "value-as-explanation" notion reduces the risk of parental wrath by moving the study of behavior from the very subjective realm of what ought to be the more objective realm of analysis applied to television characterization and human explanation.

